

[Living on His Knees]

No. 1

Approximately 3,000 words

87 A Revises SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: LIVING ON HIS KNEES

Date of First Writing March 6, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Michael Haiglar (Negro)

Fictitious Name Mike Hair

Street Address 1407 Park Street

Place Columbia, S. C.

Occupation Peanut Vender

Name of Writer Helen Shuler

Name of Reviser State Office

"F-r-e-s-h peanuts! F-r-e-s-h peanuts! Fresh parched peanuts. Any parched peanuts today? Little Spanish peanuts, parched this morning."

This happy call attracted every passerby to a sawed-off Negro peanut vender.

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"Fresh parched peanuts? Yes, ma'am, just parched this morning. Thank you. Thank you kindly.

I'll be glad to tell you why I can smile all the time. The fall 2 after my accident, our church was having a protracted meeting. All of us young people was going to the meetings just to have a good time. I had just had this close call to death, and I began to realize that I didn't know the Lord. One night the preacher told us about the book of life. He said that our names must be written in that book or we would be cast into a lake of fire. I knew that my name was not written in the book, and I knew that I didn't want to be put into that lake of fire. While I was seeking the Lord, some of the good sisters got together and prayed for me. But it seemed that I couldn't get an answer. Days and nights I prayed, fasted, and was sorrowful, but there wasn't a sign. Then one night, way in the wee small hours before day, I began to see the light. I got a sign from the Lord and I come through. Such a singing and a shouting in my heart! I couldn't kept quiet, but shouted out loud. My mother came running to know what was the trouble. I told her that at last I had found the Lord. And she rejoiced with me. After that experience, my heart feels so light and I am happy all the time, even if I don't have any legs. The train cut them off.

"One morning, when I was just a little boy, I was walking up the railroad track to my work. I saw a train in front of me, but I didn't hear the one behind me. Dr. Houseal and Dr. Gilder operated on me on my mother's kitchen table. They cut my legs off the same length, as that would allow me to walk easier. They left a little five inch stub below the knee joint. Now I wear my shoes turned around. My knees rest in the heel, and the stub turns back into the toe of the shoe.

"No, I didn't go to a hospital. There wasn't one in Newberry at that time. They didn't have money to send me to Columbia. My mother took care of me and tried to do just like the doctors told her. In two months I was 3 up again. Then I had to learn to walk again. I didn't know how to stand upon my knees. At first I just crawled around like a baby. My father made me some crutches, but my knees blistered so bad I couldn't get around that

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way. Then I bought me a little goat and wagon. I was such a child, I was tickled to death with the little thing. My little friends came to play, and we took turns riding and driving. Sometimes I would put one in the back of the wagon with me.

"Yes'm, my father sued the railroad for ten thousand dollars. The case was tried three times, and each time it ended in a mistrial. The lawyers tried to get my father to compromises but he wouldn't. One day Pa had to go out of town, and he cautioned my mother not to sign any papers while he was gone. But the lawyers came and persuaded her to compromise for six hundred dollars. They got half of that. Pa was terrible put out when he got back home, but it was too late then.

"Some people tried to persuade me to beg on the streets. They said I could just ride around in my wagon. But I know I couldn't be satisfied doing that. I wanted to be doing something for myself. As soon as I had learned to walk again, I began looking for a job. In June, Mrs. Golden hired ne to cut wood and to work her garden. I worked with her one year. Then she moved to Atlanta.

"The next job I had was with Mrs. T. M. Rogers. This time I was just a handy man around the place. I cleaned house, ran errands, took care of her children, and worked in the yard. I worked there until 1909.

"When I left Mrs. Rogers, I began selling balloons and pencils and other trinkets on the street. During the summer I went to nearby towns.

"My next trip was to Chattanooga. This time I didn't do so well, and 4 I wrote to Mrs. Golden in Atlanta. She sent for me to come help her in her boarding house. I left her to open a shoeshine stand on Marietta Street, This paid me two or three dollars a day. Oftentimes at night, after I closed my stand, I would go and shoot craps with some of the boys. Sometimes I won, sometimes I lost everything I had made for several days. I was having a grand time. Nothing worried me. The devil was working on me again.

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"Me and one of the boys fell in love with the same girl, and I left town in a hurry one night. When I stopped, I found myself in Cincinnati. Mr. De Willis gave me the job to keep his barber shop clean and to shine shoes. He furnished the polish and gave me half of the money I made.

"In the fall, I went to the Fair in Kentucky, and then to the State Fair in Indianapolis. I liked the vending business better than any other. It paid me enough to buy new supplies, my train fare to the next town, and something to eat. I liked to travel. There was a lively crowd following the Fairs. We had good times shooting craps, when we didn't get caught.

"One night some of us boys was gambling in a little shop down an alley. The police raided our place. The others ran and left me to go to jail. I had to serve my time, as I was broke, but they kept me there only a few days. As soon as I got out, I went on with my vending, and went as far as Chicago. But I only stayed there a week, as I couldn't get my license to vend. Gradually I made my way back and went on into New York State. I visited Rochester, Erie, and Buffalo, and then worked across to New York City. That is a great place. For the next twenty years, I divided my time between New York and Jersey City. I was there during the World War. When they began drafting men for the Army, I reported for duty. But the officers told me it wasn't necessary.

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"Yes New York is a great place. But I have no desire to go back, I am a different boy now. I am living closer to the Lord, trusting him, and am happy every day.

"Now I'm coming down to the real thing. Are you a Christian? Then you know what I'm talking about. I was a young man, just drifting about, making contacts with all kinds of people. I was big-hearted, generous with what money I had, and made lots of friends. Some pretended to be friends, but just got all they could out of me. I was careless, didn't go to church, even went to baseball on Sunday. We all like a little extra money, easy money. We like to have something to spend, so I continued to play the numbers. I know it

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was wrong to do these things, but it was so pleasant to follow along with my friends. The Spirit would whip me - chastise me just like a father. Then I'd do better for a little while, go to church a few times and read my Bible. A few nights later, I'd hear a voice tempting me, 'Mike there's a nice little game going on down the street, and all your friends are there having a good time. You are sitting here lonesome. Why not join them for a little while? You haven't any money. You can't have a good time. Come on, Mike.'

"The Lord come to me in His Spirit and showed me wonderful visions. He told me to put these numbers I was playing in a cloth and bury them. He meant that I should stop playing the numbers. I would stop for a while but the devil was working, and I was weak. I couldn't stop all at one time. But I made up my mind to trust the Lord; so I stopped playing the numbers and stopped smoking. That is a filthiness of the flesh.

"In my young days, I didn't know what religion was; but as I am growing in grace with the Lord, things come to me more plainer. When I got older, I met good people, and then I saw the other side of life. They gave me Gospel tracts to read and told me to read my Bible. Four years ago, I made it a habit to read a part of the Bible every day. It sure will strengthen you.

"In New York, I had a room with a boy friend and his wife. They were real friends. They treated me just like one of the family. When I would go home at night and start to read my Bible, friends would drop in to see me. When they'd come in, I'd close my Bible and put it aside. I didn't want to make them think I was slurring them. I closed my Bible to welcome them and make them feel at home. I roomed with my friend several months. One night while I was asleep, sound asleep, the Spirit of the Lord came to me and warned me to get up and get out of that place - get out of that place and go to Jersey. I woke up, and I didn't quite understand why I should leave those friends and to/ go Jersey. I didn't know any one in Jersey. So I prayed to the Lord to make it plainer. I was willing for him to lead, and I'd go anywhere. I was already converted all this time, but I didn't belong to any church. Oftentimes the Spirit had come to me and warned me to visit some church. After

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I prayed to the Lord to make it plainer, I went back to sleep and the Lord pointed me to a certain woman who used to live over in Jersey. I went to her the same week, and she recommended me to some people, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, in Jersey, and I went to live with them. At the time, I didn't fully understand what it was all about. But, after I got a room with the Browns, I joined the church.

"I continued to work, shined shoes every day in New York. Made the trip from Jersey City to New York every day except Sunday. I shined shoes during the week and made two or three dollars a day. On Saturday I vended pencils and made five or six dollars. When I got home at nights I read my Bible.

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And I became a very good church worker. That's about all I done. At church the people liked me. The pastor saw I was a good man, and he asked me to be an elder and to sing in the choir.

"At this time, one of my sisters had lost her husband, and she persuaded me to come home to help her. I had sympathy for her, and you know there's no place like the home place, so I came and helped all I was able to. I went back to work with Mrs. T. M. Rogers, as a handy man around the house, for two dollars a week. Mrs. Rogers parched peanuts, and on Saturdays, I sold them on the streets in Newberry. She gave me twenty-five cents on the dollar. I worked for her from November 1936, until September 1937. I lived with my sister, and there was a lot of confusion. She had some children, and there was always a crowd of company coming in. Then I decided to come to Columbia. Here I have a room all to myself. I can go in and shut the door and it's quiet and nobody troubles me. I can read my Bible and enjoy myself.

"On January 5, early in the morning before day, the spirit of the Lord spoke to me. Said, 'Preach,' and I woke up. The Lord taught me to get up in the wee small hours of the morning to pray. Oftentimes in these cold mornings I lay there lazy and sleeping. The Spirit

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would wake me up again, and then I'd get up and pray. It's a habit now. That morning when I woke up, I prayed, 'Father give me more faith, more knowledge, more wisdom, and a better understanding, and I'll go out to preach.' Then I went back to sleep, and the Spirit made it more plainer. The voice said, "Go read John in Washington Street." Of course, you meet all kinds of people in Washington Street. But I went to Washington Street, and I talked to men and gave them Gospel tracts I got at the Columbia Bible College. I gave the Book of John to one man and later gave him a New Testament. I told my landlady about my 8 vision, and she advised me to go to my parson. When I explained to the parson that the Lord had oftentimes warned me to preach, he was very much interested. He told me to meet with the next Quarterly Conference, on Sunday, for my examination.

"The presiding elder examined me. He asked me, 'Why do you want to preach?' Then he asked me why I didn't go and preach. I said I didn't think I had the proper education nor faith enough. But I had promised the Lord that I would preach. Then he asked, 'You want a local license?' I said, 'Yes, I want to go into the highways to preach. I don't want a church.' Then he says, 'Can you raise a hymn?' I told him I thought I could, so he handed me a hymn book and told me to line a hymn. I picked this hymn, and the audience helped me. 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see.'

"After the song was ended, the presiding elder said that my license would be there in a few days. While waiting for my license to come, I was on trial. I'd go to my church, Bethel Methodist, every Sunday and to prayer meeting in the week. I helped when they needed me. They watched to see how well I did my work. I haven't received any money for my services. I don't want money. I only want to save souls for Jesus.

"Some of the brothers spoke in favor of having me preach, and the parson said he would appoint a Sunday for me to preach. About a month ago, he gave me a trial Sunday. I took my text from the fourth chapter of Philippians and the eighth verse. It's Paul speaking, and reads, 'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,

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whatsoever things are just, 9 whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on those things.' I got along all right. As it was my first time, I felt that I didn't want to do anything against the pastor's order. So I got a chair, placed it beside the altar, put my book there, and done my preaching.

"I want to live my life as an example to other people. I always pray to the Lord to show me how to preach and ask him to use me as an instrument to bring people to Jesus.

"I'm going to try my best to preach and to be a good boy. The Lord has been so good to me - that's why I always have a smile on my face. I can smile through trouble and everything. Disappointments come to all of us through life. I used to want lots of money, but now, if I have a quarter, I am happy; and, if I don't have it, I'm happy. I rejoice in the Lord's salvation. I love that prayer of David, the 51st Psalm. At first I learned to the tenth verse, but now I know it all.

"The Spirit of the Lord comes to me in my sleep and tells me what songs to sing in church. Good Friday night, the last night of my fast, I was singing in my sleep. I was singing 'Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior.' The voice told me to sing 'Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone, and All the World Go Free?' And the voice kept saying 15-15. When I woke I thought the voice wanted me to sing the song over and over fifteen times. But the next day, while I was at my work on the street, it come to me more plainer. The spirit wanted me to sing the song fifteen times out on the street. Just before day Easter morning, the Spirit told me to use 27. When I got my little red song book and looked up number 27, I found it was that beautiful song, 'Love Divine.'

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"Ever since I came to Columbia, in September, 1939, I have been selling peanuts on the street. I buy my peanuts down on Assembly Street. They are already cooked and packed. I pay thirty-five cents for a dozen bags and clear twenty-five cents a dozen. In the season

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for boiled peanuts, I sell from six to eight dozen bags every day except Saturday. On Saturdays, I sell twelve or thirteen dozen. Now, in the winter time, I sell from four to six dozen through the week and ten or twelve dozen on Saturday. The colored people like the boiled ones better, but the white people buy more parched. Every morning I come down on the streets about nine o'clock and work until five or five-thirty in the afternoon. On Saturday, I work until nine o'clock at night.

"How do I make my call? I just rattle my tongue. 'F-r-e-s-h peanuts!' That's just salesmanship. 'F-r-e-s-h peanuts! Any parched peanuts today?'